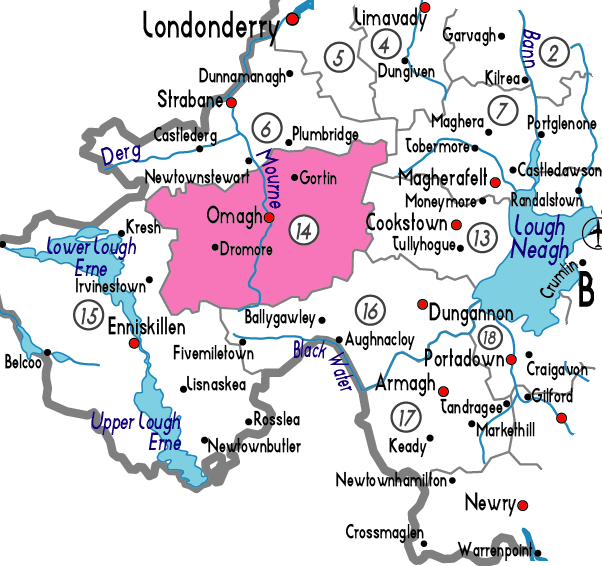
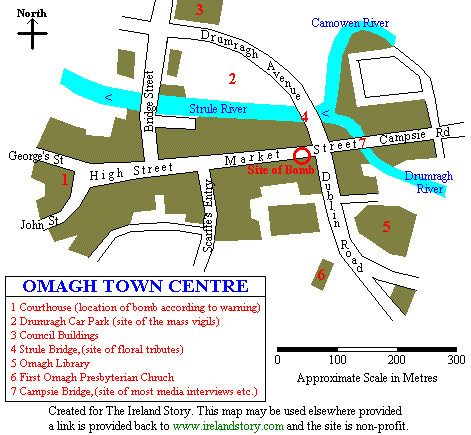
**Omagh Bombing**

*The Town of Omagh*

Omagh is located in the centre of the country Tyrone. It has 17 300 people. It is the largest town in the county and is 70 miles west of Belfast and 40 miles south of Derry city.



*Before the Bomb*

On Saturday 15 August, 1998, many families and children were shopping. It was two weeks before school resumed, and many were shopping at the two school-uniform specialists. Students were also home from University and were working in shops to earn some summer holiday money. Later that day a carnival was expected to move through the town centre. The town was overflowing with people.

Around 2pm a red Vauxhall Cavalier registration number MDZ 5211 was driven into Market Street from an easterly direction and was parked outside one of the school uniform specialist shops (SD Kells). The two male occupants walked away from the car down to Campsie Road. (seen on map above). Shoppers ignored the car – they were not aware of the fact that it contained 140kg of fertiliser-based explosive attached to a semtex trigger. The car had been stolen in St McCartan’s Villas, in Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan on the Thursday before.

This chilling photo to the right was found by investigators in a camera buried in the rubble. It is one of the most poignant images of the whole event. This image was taken just minutes before the bomb exploded, and it clearly shows the red car – with its deadly hidden cargo beside dozens of oblivious civilians.

Part of this crowd was made up of school children on a trip from Buncrana, from Donegal county. The Irish children were hosting Spanish children on an exchange programme. The bomb was to claim the lives of four of these children, as well as a minder.

At this time, Maggie Hall was working in the headquarters of Ulster Televition in Belfast. At 2:30pm she answered the telephone and a man gave her a bomb warning. She phoned the RUC’s emergency switchboard and spoke to Constable George Mullan. She said “I’m only after getting a call from a man with a country accent, saying there’s a bomb in Omagh main street near the courthouse, a 500lb bomb. It’s going to go off in 30 minutes”. She also told this Constable Mullan that the caller had given the code word “Malta Pope”. The Constable phoned the warning through to Omagh. He later said that the codeword gave him a ‘gut feeling’ that this wasn’t a hoax. Three minutes later the phone rang again and a second warning was given, this time reducing the time to 15 minutes.

Between these two calls, a female worker at the Coleraine Office at the Samaritans charity answered the telephone and heard a man give a bomb warning. She immediately phoned the RUC’s emergency switchboard. In her phone call she said “I have received a bomb call for Omagh town centre approximately 200 yards from the courthouse and the code word *Malta Pope* was given.

The Meaning of Malta Pope - this was the name of an aide of Senator George Mitchell who chaired the negotiations in 1997 and 1998. This codeword was the same as that given for the Bandridge bomb a few weeks before which had been claimed by the “Real” IRA.

Here is a transcript of the phone calls:

* **Received by Ulster Television at 14:30**  
  "There's a bomb, courthouse, Omagh, main street, 500 pounds, explosion 30 minutes."
* **Received by the Coleraine office of the 'Samaritans' charity, 14:32**  
  "Am I through to Omagh? This is a bomb warning. It's going to go off in 30 minutes." [followed possibly by a further piece of information specifying 200 yards from the courthouse].
* **Received by Ulster Television at 14:35**  
  "Bomb, Omagh town, 15 minutes."

The target which was specified was the courthouse in Omagh. The police cordoned off High Street and moved people away from the courthouse and the top end of the town and moved them towards the supposed safety of Market Street. They began carefully searching the area around the courthouse.

These inaccurate warnings **doubled the number of people in the vicinity of the car-bomb when it detonated at 3:10pm**. Many of those who were killed had been in High Street, but these misleading warnings meant they were moved into danger.

*The Bomb Explosion* 

At 3:10pm on Saturday 15 August 1998, the car bomb exploded at the centre of the crowd. Fragments of the car were later found hundreds of feet away. The entire front wall of SD Kells clothes shop was blasted into the building and the roof collapsed into the top floor. Several of those who were killed were found in this shop. The force of the bomb was so great that at a furniture shop, the contents were blown to the other end of the shop and was sticking out of the windows at the rear. The owner of this shop, Elizabeth Rush, died. The blast wave was so powerful that the bodies of several victims were never found.

The intense heat of the explosion caused severe burns. Debris which flew in the air also caused injuries. A water main under the road was exposed by the blast, and gallons of water were poured over the wreckage, washing many bodies down the hill.

21 people died instantly. A fleet of ambulances carried the most critically injured to the Tyrone County Hospital. Two passing buses and a large number of cars were volunteered to take the rest fo hospital. The police used the chemists in town to get the essential medical supplies. Blankets were gotten from nearby shops to cover the dead bodies.

220 people were injured all together. All medical staff, through the radio, were ordered and begged to go to their nearest hospital to assist. Many doctors and nurses, including many who were on holiday, acted and answered this appeal. The work of the staff at Tyrone County Hospital was magnificent.

Tragically, one of the ambulances which was rushing to Belfast was in a collision with a car, killing the driver, Mr Gray White.

For the next seven hours, 50 fireman searched through the rubble, looking for survivors.

Here is a list and the ages of people who died:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [Rocio Abad Ramos](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#rocio_abad_ramos) (age 23) | [Mary Grimes](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#mary_grimes) (66) | [Avril Monaghan](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#avril_monaghan) (30) |
| [James Barker](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#james_barker) (12) | [Olive Hawkes](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#olive_hawkes) (60) | [Maura Monaghan](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#maura_monaghan) (1) |
| [Fernando Blasco Baselga](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#fernando_blasco_baselga) (12) | [Julia Hughes](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#julia_hughes) (21) | [Alan Radford](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#alan_radford) (16) |
| [Geraldine Breslin](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#geraldine_breslin) (43) | [Brenda Logue](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#brenda_logue) (17) | [Elizabeth Rush](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#elizabeth_rush) (57) |
| [Deborah-Anne Cartwright](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#deborah_anne_cartwright) (20) | [Jolene Marlow](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#jolene_marlow) (17) | [Veda Short](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#veda_short) (56) |
| [Gareth Conway](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#gareth_conway) (18) | [Ann McCombe](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#ann_mccombe) (48) | [Philomena Skelton](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#philomena_skelton) (49) |
| [Breda Devine](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#breda_devine) (1) | [Brian McCrory](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#brian_mccrory) (54) | [Bryan White](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#bryan_white) (27) |
| [Oran Doherty](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#oran_doherty) (8) | [Samantha McFarland](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#samantha_mcfarland) (17) | [Frederick White](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#frederick_white) (60) |
| [Adian Gallagher](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#adrian_gallagher) (21) | [Sean McGrath](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#sean_mcgrath) (61) | [Lorraine Wilson](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#lorraine_wilson) (15) |
| [Esther Gibson](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#esther_gibson) (36) | [Sean McLaughlin](http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/dead.html#sean_mclaughlin) (12) |  |



Since the bomb, there have been various police investigations and reflection days. It has taken a long time and a huge struggle for people to come to terms with what happened. Dozens of people have quietly started new lives, with missing people and sometimes with physical damage to themselves.

There has been an Omagh Fund, set up to raise money.

Many of the victims have been unable to come into the town centre since the event took place. Many of those who do don’t stay for very long. Trade has suffered in town since the bomb for this reason. There have been various hoax bomb alerts, which has caused much horror and torture to the community. Some say that the hoaxes are causing more stress than the actual bomb did.

In an attempt to get rid of the memory of the bomb, Omagh council demolished all the buildings near to the bomb sight and have embarked on an ambitious development plan. A memorial garden has also been built. Thousands of bouquets and flowers have been left at the scene of the bomb in the days which followed.



Useful Websites:  
<http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/omagh/before.html><http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/15/newsid_2496000/2496009.stm>  
<http://www.omaghbombmemorial.com/>  
<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/omagh/events.htm>  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/15/newsid_2496000/2496009.stm>